

FIGURE-EIGHT OBSTACLE COURSE

Figure-eight walking patterns require changes in direction and momentum. You can easily add difficulties with small changes in pace, patterns, obstacles, lighting, and so on. It's easy to be creative with this activity.

Benefits »

- Integrates many balance systems and skills.
- Uses visual targets.
- Enhances postural control.

Set It Up »

Set up an easy, widely spaced figure-eight or slalom course. It can be two to eight agility poles, cones, or even chairs set in a row; for large classes use two groups of chairs set in a circle. The design should accommodate participants with walkers. If your course will have other challenges, prepare for those.

How to Do It »

Participants will weave their way through the course. There are endless variations you can try.

EZ Eights

EZ Eights are easy courses. Obstacles are wide apart so there is plenty of room to pass between them, and they're easy to negotiate (no doorways to go through, no steps to walk up and over). Lighting should also be comfortable and bright, not dimmed. EZ Eights involve normal walking (no sidestepping or big arm swings).

Use the following cues.

- Observe the upcoming course and any obstacles.
- Make a plan.
- Start weaving through the course.
- Look ahead to the next turn.
- Look ahead two turns.

To give this exercise more balance challenge, you can try the following:

- Vary chair position—offset some chairs and set others closer.
- Walk faster.
- Recite a poem or sing “Happy Birthday” while walking.
- Add arm swings.



Tighter Eights

Tighter Eights can be an intermediate or difficult activity. You will need to supervise closely, and participants should probably take turns. Tighter Eights and variations are created by making the basic figure eight tighter or otherwise more difficult.

- ⦿ Use fewer poles. (The 180-degree turn at the ends happens sooner and more frequently.)
- ⦿ Make pathways smaller and tighter.
- ⦿ Provide tight spaces in which to maneuver.
- ⦿ Make part of the pathways go through a doorway (place chairs on both sides of the doorway; they'll go around one chair, through the door, then around the other chair).
- ⦿ Set it up so that one end of the figure eight requires them to turn in and out of a corner or walk close to a wall.
- ⦿ Set a chair in a corner where a pivot is needed to come back out (advanced).
- ⦿ Vary stepping patterns (big steps, long steps, marching, on toes, side steps).
- ⦿ Dim the lights or provide sunglasses or ski goggles (it's a slalom course).
- ⦿ Add a cognitive task, such as counting backward by 5 from 100 or recalling old addresses or cars.

To give this exercise more balance challenge, you can try the following:

- ⦿ Make it a timed event; encourage them to go faster each pass.
 - Cue them to walk as fast as they safely can.
 - During the next pass cue them to take big steps.
 - Which was faster, fast steps or big steps? (Probably big steps were.)
- ⦿ Randomly call out changes in direction or pace.
- ⦿ Have participants sidestep through.
- ⦿ Have them walk with their back to the chairs, hands touching the chairs.
- ⦿ Ask them questions as they walk or sidestep through.

Keep It Safe »

The more difficult the course, the more supervision is needed. Tighter figure eights may cause some people to become dizzy. Keep the course fairly simple and progress slowly, providing plenty of supervision.

Live It »

Figure-eight practice helps participants integrate many aspects of balance. It covers many everyday walking challenges.